



## Conference Brief

Strategic Studies Institute

U.S. Army War College, and

The Dante B. Fascell  
North-South Center  
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

The Dante B. Fascell North-South Center,  
University of Miami

### Building Regional Security Cooperation in the Western Hemisphere

Compiled by  
Dr. Max G. Manwaring

#### Key Insights:

- Strategic thought regarding a cooperative security and stability policy and strategy in the hemisphere is in disarray and at an impasse.
- Thus, the countries of the Western Hemisphere continue to work toward regional security, separately.
- The point from which to build regional security cooperation is for the United States to make a low-cost but high-yield investment in multilateralism.
- Core elements would be:
  - Continued and enhanced multilateral dialogue to strengthen ties.
  - Development of a conceptual blue-print for security/stability that will establish the linkages to the effect that there can be no state sovereignty without legitimized stability. The intent is to put the hemispheric debate on the definition of security to rest.
  - Development of the understanding that accomplishing the central strategic task of regaining control of lawless territories and enforcing the rule of law in a civil society goes beyond the narrow purview of training and equipping units. It extends to broader multilateral professional civil-military education and leader development.

Contemporary security and stability are fragile in the Western Hemisphere. Those issues constitute threats that are exacerbated by "spill-over" problems from Colombia's narco-terrorists and global terrorism. As a corollary, an insecure and unstable hemisphere threatens U.S. security, regional economic and social-political development, and ultimately, global stability. In that context, The Dante B. Fascell North-South Center of the University of Miami, the U.S. Southern Command, and the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College held the sixth in a series of major conferences dealing with security matters in the Western Hemisphere. Attendees included approximately 300 civilians and military officers from most countries of the Western Hemisphere; academics; nongovernment organization representatives; and the

private sector. In the recent past, the focus was primarily on Colombia and *Plan Colombia*. But because of the "spill-over" issues stemming from the Colombian crisis, that focus was broadened. The conference, held in Miami, Florida, on March 2-4, 2003, centered on "Building Regional Security Cooperation in the Western Hemisphere." The attendees' generally congenial dialogue focused on two key issues: the urgency of the Colombian Crisis, and the requirement for a hemispheric architecture that can deal cooperatively and effectively with the security and instability threats that have meaning for us all.

### **The Urgency of the Colombian Crisis.**

The reality of the Colombian situation indicates three strategic-level problems. First, Colombia and its potential are deteriorating because three interrelated wars that have been ongoing for years—insurgency, illegal drug trafficking, and vigilante paramilitary movements, often referred to as "narco-terrorism"—are threatening the economic development of that country. In that context, Colombia's internal and external trade is being reduced to unacceptable depression-type levels. Second, Colombia's unholy terrorist trinity of nonstate actors is perpetrating a level of corruption, criminality, human horror, and internal instability that threatens the country's survival as an organized democratic state. These kinds of activities increase "lawless" areas outside the control of the central government, and decrease the capability of the government to govern. Moreover, these kinds of activities bring into question the issue of just how representative Colombian democracy might be. Third, in these closely related terms, the terrorist trinity represents a threat to the sovereignty of the

Colombian state. It undermines the vital institutional pillars of regime stability, and it challenges the legitimate democratic governance of the country.

Thus, participants at the conference generally agreed that Colombia is a paradigm of the failing state that has enormous implications for the prosperity, stability, democracy, and peace of the Western Hemisphere. No clarion call was issued, however, for the interdependent regional community to join in a cooperative effort to help a neighbor in need. Conference participants' consensus was ambivalent; and the Colombian crisis remains essentially a Colombian problem.

### **What To Do, How To Do It, and the Means Necessary to Make It Work.**

Yet participants' consensus favored going beyond U.S.-mandated, myopic, ad hoc, piecemeal, tactical/operational, and primarily tactical military solutions—based on the current "politically correct" issue for the control of narco-terrorism—that are generating great risks for Colombia and the world around it. The fundamental follow-on questions were: "What is the strategic vision for the hemisphere, what is the strategic threat to that vision, and how can we deal strategically with it?"

Conference participants perceived that the United States is prepared to go its own way in the War on Terrorism (WOT) and deal militarily with Iraq, North Korea, and other "rogues." They also perceived the United States as oblivious to the more strategic nonmilitary problems that spawn illegal drug trafficking, terrorism, and myriad other destabilizers leading to more violence, crime, corruption, and conflict. The articulation of this perception reawakened the long-standing



Latin American juridical-political bias that tends to reject U.S. domination—and solutions—anywhere. Thus, two sticking points arose in the discussions regarding what the United States and the region can do cooperatively to deal with the WOT. They are: 1) who decides who is a terrorist; and 2) who decides how to deal with that terrorist? The participants' consensus was that, at present, the answers to those questions are determined ad hoc and unilaterally by the United States, and that is unacceptable.

Participants agreed on a strategic vision of peace, stability, security, prosperity, and civil society for the entire Western Hemisphere. At that point, however, consensus began to break down with no agreement reached on the threat. As a consequence, there could be no agreement on a unified ends-ways-means strategy that could contribute directly to achieving the strategic vision. The impasse regarding "threat" revolved around the levels of analysis issue. The traditional level of analysis defines national security in narrow military terms. Generally, it involves the protection of national sovereignty against external military aggression. A more contemporary security concept of threat goes beyond conventional external aggression to internal political, economic, and social matters. It includes the protection of national sovereignty against unconventional internal attack, as well as conventional external aggression. The impasse was complicated further by general reluctance to take the broadened definition of national security to its logical conclusion. That is, to correspondingly broaden and integrate the roles of security forces into a controversial internal sovereignty protection mission.

Again, paradoxically, attendees agreed that international terrorism and organized crime (to include illegal drug trafficking) are powerful enough to destabilize and destroy

targeted societies and sovereign states. Despite the politically charged levels of analysis debate, they agreed that the threat posed by transnational terrorism is too great and too complex for individual states and civilian institutions to confront alone.

Conference participants agreed that today's security and stability requirements call for a coordinated and cooperative multilateral application not only of all national civilian and military instruments of power, but also those of relevant international organizations. Thus, because success against the terrorist threat requires close unilateral and multilateral coordination for an effective unity of effort, the only viable approach to hemispheric stability and security is to devolve the responsibility to the Organization of American States (OAS). It can provide a moral position and structural framework from which member states can operate together when necessary and separately when desired.

### **Conclusion: In Building Security Cooperation, the Countries of the Hemisphere Are Working Together—Separately.**

The expectations, frustrations, inconsistency, and confusion reflected in the generally collegial conference dialogue are the result of three basic issues. First, the threats of unconventional transnational nonstate terrorist actors operating in Colombia and the region around it are challenging democracy, development, stability, peace, and prosperity in the hemisphere. At the same time, the political-judicial reality of the region demands an organizational-legal response to the threat and how to deal with it. In both instances, logic prescribes a level of analysis paradigm shift that many conference participants were not yet prepared to accept. Thus, the countries of the

hemisphere continue to work toward regional security—separately.

### Breaking the Impasse.

A beginning point from which to achieve security cooperation in the Western Hemisphere is that the United States needs to become a more of a partner and less of the proverbial "Colossus of the North." If the United States wants to enhance the hemispheric trade that exceeds that of Europe and Japan and develop serious cooperation with three of the largest economies in the world (i.e., Canada, Brazil, and Mexico); if it wants sustainable economic development and prosperity in the region and a viable Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA); and if it wants democracy and human rights as a basis for peace and civil societies in the Americas—then, the United States must become collegially involved in a strategy for stability in the region. That, in turn, requires an investment in multilateralism.

A low-cost but high-yield investment in the Western Hemisphere would include the following core elements.

- Continued and enhanced multilateral dialogues that will build upon mutually rewarding relationships and contribute to the strategic thought under-girding U.S. and regional security policy and strategy. Collaboration like this, with a healthy exchange of ideas, is an excellent example of the strength and potential of civil-military relations.
- Development of a guiding conceptual blue-print for hemispheric stability and security that will put the "levels of analysis" debate to rest. That is,

establishing the complex linkages that "prove" without legitimized stability there can be no effective rule of law and judicial system, and human rights; no sustained economic development and prosperity; no effective democratic processes; and no durable peace.

- Generation of understanding at the highest levels that putting military training, military equipment, and money into tactical/operational conflict situations has proven to provide ineffective reactions to inconsequential problems. To accomplish the central strategic task of regaining control of lawless territories and enforcing the rule of law in a civil society, two fundamental efforts must be undertaken.
  - First, security organizations and their leaders must be professionalized and upgraded to the point where they can enforce the law effectively and fairly.
  - Second, security organizations must be professionalized and upgraded to the point where they can neutralize or control the perpetrators of violence—regardless of label.

\*\*\*\*\*

The views expressed in this conference brief are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. This conference brief is cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

\*\*\*\*\*

More information on the Strategic Studies Institute's programs may be found on the Institute's Homepage at <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usassi/welcome.htm> or by calling (717) 245-4212.